

Walls Budget is Deficient \$235,210, Leading to Possible Staff Cuts



Productions like last year's Cinderella may become impossible with the planned budget cuts / Via Penguin Nation

By Jessie Moss ('26)
Staff Writer

Recently, the Walls theater department has been hard at work on the musical “Rent.” Sadly, the highly-anticipated production may mark the end of an era for Walls’ performing arts programs.

Mayor Muriel Bowser recently proposed a budget increase for Walls and other DCPS schools for the 2024-2025 school year. But Bowser’s proposal will hinder Walls more than it will help.

According to Student Government Association president Hugo Rosen ('24), the proposal is “nominally raising the budget, but we’re losing federal emergency funding that we’ve had for the last few years and it doesn’t account for inflation.” As a result, schools across DC will see budget cuts, Walls to the tune of \$235,210.

Bowser’s proposal, once finalized, will head to the DC Council. DCPS acknowledges that these cuts would mean the loss of staffing positions across the district.

The Local School Advisory Team (LSAT) worked with Principal Sylvia Isaac to de-

termine, based on class enrollment figures, which programs were ‘least essential.’ Per the minutes from February’s LSAT meeting, the performing arts and language departments have the fewest students for their number of teachers.

As a result, if the budget cuts pass, the tentative likely outcome is the termination of a language track at Walls, as well as the loss of theater teacher Lea Zaslavsky — and with her the end of the Walls theater program. Other DCPS schools could be losing up to ten teachers. The cuts will also overturn legislation passed based on the Sunrise Hub’s climate advocacy.

“We can’t cut it from menial expenses like building maintenance or lunches,” Rosen, a representative for the LSAT, explained. “Sports are funded by the Home and School Association while menial expenses and teacher salaries are funded by DCPS, so that wasn’t an option. The LSAT looked at this and decided to cut two teaching positions.”

“The problem with this is that DC
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DCPS Reconsiders Pandemic-Era Grading Policies

By Theo Weller ('25)
Sports Writer

During the COVID-19 pandemic, DCPS’ grading policies became far more permissive. The minimum score a student could receive on any assignment was raised from a zero to a 63%. Teachers were prohibited from penalizing students for turning in work late and, at one point, any completed assignment counted as extra-credit. But even after the pandemic has faded into a distant memory, grading policies have remained lenient in many ways.

The lowest grade one can receive on an assignment is still a 50%, and that can only be given if a student never attempted any part of an assignment (i.e. submitted a blank page), or never turned it in. According to the DCPS grading policy, if a student has submitted any amount of work for an assignment, “however minimal it may be,” the lowest possible score they can be given is a 63%. And although the highest score a late assignment can receive is an 86%, teachers must accept late work submitted at any time before the end of the term.

But it appears that DCPS may be reevaluating these rather lenient grading policies. In a survey sent out by DCPS in January, the school district asked for community input on several aspects of the grading policy. The survey included three sections: “assignment deadlines,” “academic integrity,” and “failure due to attendance.” Each section gave respondents options for new policies.

For the “assignment deadlines” section, the possible new policies included adding new deadlines to submit late work, either two weeks before the end of the term or midway through the term.

Under “academic integrity”, the survey gave options or the response to any form of integrity related incident. While both options included failing the student on the assignment on which the student breached their academic integrity, one gave students the opportunity to resubmit the work while the other one gave no such opportunity. Under “failure due to attendance”, the survey proposed changes in the number of unexcused absences in a course for the student to be given an F in that class.

Why is DCPS considering making their grading policies harsher? One possible motivation is grade inflation. In a Rookery article from April of last year, counselor of the 2024 class, Kathryn Moore, reported that the now-senior class had an average GPA of 3.93. Even with Walls being a selective, top academic school, such numbers are staggering. With colleges taking into account the relative value of grades at different high schools, there is legitimate concern that continuing along with lenient, grade-inflating policies will hurt college admissions for DCPS students — including those from Walls.

Grade inflation isn’t unique to DCPS, either. Though grade inflation had long been happening in the US, the pandemic arguably

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Class of ‘25 Compares Digital and Paper SATs

By Zoe Fisher ('25)
News Editor

Walls administered its first-ever digital SAT in place of the traditional pencil-and-paper test on March 13. The digital version of the SAT, phased in by the College Board over the past year, is much different from previous versions.

The greatest difference between the exams is that the digital SAT is adaptive. Depending on how well a student does on the first half of each section, the second half will either be an easier or harder version.

Another big difference is that the digital test is much shorter, requiring 2 hours and 24 minutes for completion instead of the previous 3 hours and 15 minutes. In order to achieve this difference in length, the College Board cut 56 questions.

Third, the questions on the digital ver-

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College Board, which owns the SAT, recently released scores from March’s digital exam / Credits: Sara Weinrod

Budget Shortfall Would Claim Two Walls Faculty

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passed a law a few years ago called the “Schools First in Budgeting” Act and that says that when crafting the budget, DC has to put education first and give schools what they need to function,” Rosen explained. “DCPS is arguing that they’re complying with this law because they’re cutting ‘non-essential’ teachers. We think they’re breaking their own law because a theater department and an entire language department are essential to the school.”

“I think it really shows that the mayor and DCPS as a whole do not care about extracurriculars,” said Rowan King (‘25). “They have no respect for the mental health of the students ... It restricts students from learning what they could learn and what they’re passionate about.”

For King and others, the loss of Ms. Z the theater program will be a devastating blow to self-expression.

“Walls also has more language departments than many other schools,” King explained. “So the impact on them will also be larger. We’re actually the privileged ones in this scenario.”

“There are essentially two efforts going on at Walls to combat this: the student effort and the parent effort,” said Rosen, who is also the student representative on the LSAT. “The parents are trying to testify at DCPS budget hearings and lobby their local Council members.” Rosen continued, “A lot of students care individually about the effects that losing a drama and a language teacher will have on the school and I’m working with a few other students to organize those different perspectives into one coherent voice.” With a few other students, Rosen has worked to circulate a change.org petition addressed to the DC Council demanding a fairer budget

These implications are not unique to

Walls. “I started off wanting to only prioritize Walls but then I realized this is a whole DCPS-wide issue,” Rosen said.

“Losing any teachers, especially at a school this small, will be bad for our culture,” Rosen concluded. “The DC budget is big. They can take the money out of something else to fund DCPS. That’s perfectly possible.”

Dozens of students have already signed up to testify against the budget cuts. Rosen encourages more students to testify, sign petitions, and join the fight to protect the theater and language departments, as well as to advocate for other schools for whom these cuts will be similarly devastating.

“A lot of people have heard these rumors... and it feels final, it feels irreversible,” Rosen concluded. “It really isn’t—if we get enough students to speak up.”

King reinforced this message, saying, “We need all the help we can get.”

Reach out to Rosen, Anna Mayer (‘25), or the Sunrise Hub for more information on how to testify and fight these budget cuts. ●

Art Honor Society Transforms Walls into a Gallery

By Zoe Becker (‘26)
Staff Writer

For students walking through the Walls hallways during mid-March something felt different, and not just because winter is relenting and the third floor classrooms are beginning to feel hotter and stuffier than ever. Walls was bursting with energy and art. Prints, photos, and paintings lined the hallways as the school’s chapter of the National Art Honor Society (NAHS) prepared for its annual winter showcase.

The event, which took place on the evening of Tuesday, March 12, highlighted a wide

range of Walls student artwork: some digital, some traditional, some multimedia. Several of the pieces were sold to showcase attendees as a part of a fundraising effort for the Walls Home and School Association (HSA).

And in the chaos of burgeoning AP season and daily Walls life, the NAHS showcase served as a reminder of the finer things in life. As showgoers wandered through the halls of the third floor where the exhibit took place, soft jazz music echoed through the building as artists and NAHS members, wearing multi-colored berets, guided and spoke with visitors.

The HSA provided funds so that the NAHS could serve sparkling cider in champagne flutes and offer decadent plates of fruit,

cheese, and crackers to visitors. The event really was a celebration of the Walls community as much as it was of student artists.

“I feel like Walls parents don’t always have opportunities to step into the building, so seeing parents being able to enjoy the art made by their students was a nice way to bring the community together,” said Avajane Lei (‘24), who attended the event.

And then, of course, there was the art itself. Notable works included a display by TransHealthTees, a group of Walls juniors who design and sell t-shirts and put the proceeds towards supporting safe healthcare for transgender teens in DC, as well as a life-size, anatomically accurate drawing of a skeleton done by student Jason Cao (‘25).

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Crime in DC: Shoplifting, Secure DC, and Student Sentiments

By Theo Weller (‘25)
Staff Writer

Over the past year, one topic has dominated the newscycle in DC — crime. DC saw a 26% increase in crime in 2023 compared to 2022, according to the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD). Images of store shelves emptied by shoplifting became national news, making DC a focal point in national discussions about crime prevention. The Foggy Bottom area has been no exception. Advisory Neighborhood Commission area 2A, which includes School Without Walls, saw a staggering 54% increase in crime in 2023 over 2022. Walls students have felt the effects.

One anonymous student reported, “I was walking to the grocery store and three kids, younger than me, came up to me and threatened to shoot me if I did not give them my phone. It was pretty obvious that they did not have any weapon and their attempt was unsuccessful.” Despite this incident, the student didn’t feel very threatened by crime. “I think the incident has opened my eyes to the uptick that some people are talking about. I don’t necessarily feel less safe, but I’ve become more wary of the situation.”

Another anonymous student was followed home after school by middle schoolers, who threatened them and their friend with what appeared to be a gun. “The kids followed us . . . they ran up toward us and one of them had a gun in his pants.” The student said that the middle schoolers demanded they empty out their backpacks. However, the student did not feel particularly threatened due to the



CVS pharmacy, popular haunt for Walls students, has reported shoplifting by students / Credit: David Sipos

short stature and youth of the attackers, and simply walked away without consequence. “[My friend] said later that it looked like [the gun] was fake . . . I don’t know how a middle schooler would have a gun.”

Though not everyone has been as directly impacted as those students, most SWW students seem to have noticed the increase in crime. Max Zeidler (‘24) said “I haven’t actually seen any crime in DC but I know a lot of people in my neighborhood have had packages stolen from their porches and a few neighbors have been robbed. My family has been pretty lucky so far and haven’t lost anything, although our car has been broken into a few times, but noth-

ing has been taken.”

Following pressure from residents to curb the rise in crime, the DC City Council responded with the passage of the Secure DC Omnibus Bill in March. The act is certainly a hot-button issue, with not everyone agreeing that it takes the right approach to preventing crime.

The act contains several controversial provisions. One provision of the amended act adds an additional penalty for wearing a mask or face covering while committing a crime. Many Washingtonians have expressed concerns that

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Students React to Stricter Enforcement of Late Policy

By Brady Woodhouse ('25)
Staff Writer

Upon arriving at school late, some students have been lucky enough to hear the click of the intercom and the familiar announcement: "Please do not mark students tardy until 9:20 due to train delays." Most of the time, however, students do not receive such a reprieve.

Many students have recently noticed a difference in the administration's handling of tardiness. Now, students who arrive late must add their names to a list, possibly resulting in a stint in lunch detention. This level of enforcement is new for Walls, which previously has relied very little, if at all, on detention as a disciplinary measure.

Walls administration stated, however, that policies around lateness haven't changed. Rather, tardy students are noticing a renewed enforcement effort. Attendance counselor Wanda Jones-Hinnant said, "there is no new late policy, but we have to keep track of students with consistent truancy." At this point in the school year, determining which students are chronically late becomes easier, informing administration decisions.

Students have begun to notice the increased attendance enforcement. While students generally recognize the importance of punctuality, seeing it as a matter of respect for teachers and their classes, some feel blindsided. One student said, "I don't think it's fair to make these changes without telling us."

Other students are concerned that the policy is inequitable to students who experience consistent barriers at home that affect their attendance, "especially for the kids who have trouble getting to school because of problems at home or the kids who can't always get to school the same way each day." The students seemed to agree that there was a link between tardiness and barriers at home. For example, a late-evening work shift, a heated argument between family members, and unsafety in one's neighborhood all may interfere with a student's punctuality on a long-term basis.

Meanwhile, administration responds that the late policy tries to account for and help students with those barriers to arriving on time. "We can't help that your car broke down or that there are bus delays, and we will excuse those," Ms. Jones-Hinnant said. She continued, "No matter, students with [a 504 accommodation plan], a headache, or bad time management, you have to show up to school on time." She added that the school psychologist, Dr. Lori McDowell, "has a time management class" to help students arrive to school by 9 AM.

Ms. Jones-Hinnant also talked about the importance of building good habits and planning ahead, especially once students leave high school. "If you can predict trouble with getting to school then you need to plan for it because you won't get a second chance in the corporate world," she said.

While students stressed the importance of flexibility for those with attendance barriers, they also understood that the school cannot simply ignore chronic tardiness. One student commented, "we can't give out free

Digital SAT Adapts Difficulty Level Based on Student Performance

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sion are formatted differently than on the paper version. The reading and writing sections have been combined. Each question in this new section is based on an individual paragraph, as opposed to having a series of questions that follow a full-length passage. Finally, students can use the Desmos graphing calculator throughout the math section of the test.

The College Board has stated that the scoring and level of difficulty of the exams are exactly the same. However, this is not the conclusion many students have come to.

School Without Walls' class of 2025 has a unique perspective on the changes in the test structure, as many students took both the paper version in the Fall and the digital version in the Spring. Students reported that for those who prefer shorter passages and the use of the Desmos graphing calculator, the digital SAT is much easier. Max Stacey ('25) explains that, "on the paper [SAT] I struggled to finish each section as I found myself running out of time. But on the digital, I will finish with 8-10 minutes left pretty consistently." For many students, shorter passages help them go through questions faster, as they do not need to pause to look back at a long passage.

Moreover, the math modules are easier, according to Seojin Kim ('25). "Since we had a graphing calculator for the [entire] math section, a lot of the harder problems relied less

on us being able to calculate things or know algebra rules, and more on us understanding the larger concept well," she said. Using the graphing calculator throughout made test-taking much simpler. Augusta Kankel ('25) commented that "there were many questions where you didn't need to do any math because you had Desmos."

At the same time, the adaptive testing made the second math module on the March 9 exam much more challenging. Stacey said, "the practice tests that the College Board provided did not reflect the difficulty of the second math section at all." The College Board is gauging how to create an effective adaptive test, and so the difficulty levels may change for future tests. However, because the SAT is graded on a curve, students' scores will not be negatively impacted by a relatively more difficult test.

For decades, the SAT has been the most popular standardized test for American college admissions. However, in the past few years its relevance has diminished, as many universities went test-optional due to the COVID-19 pandemic, among other factors. Many high schoolers opted not to send their test scores to colleges, with some deciding not to take the SAT or ACT at all. However, this reality is beginning to change as many universities, including Dartmouth and Yale, have reverted back to requiring some form of standardized test scores in future admissions cycles. In line with these changing times, the age of the digital SAT has begun. ●



Students wait in line to go through security / Credit: Sara Weinrod

passes all the time though because, first, students who don't actually have any reason not to get to school on time will just take advantage of that, and second, that's only a bandaid for students who really need help at home."

Administration made clear that the late policy is not a means of punishment. "If students show up at 9:02, we make them sign the list just so they know and are uncomfortable with being late. It's the students who are consistent[ly tardy] that we have to give lunch detention," Ms. Jones-Hinnant said.

Students have also noted that lunch detention punishment is not always enforced. One student boldly said, "I can usually sweet talk my way out of it." This forgiving nature

of administration underscores that the policy was not made to punish students but to offer a reminder that lateness comes with consequences in the real world.

Enforcement of the late policy is rather about preparing students for life after high school. "I just pray some of these students never have a 9 AM [college] class because they will be locked out and get a zero for that day," she explained.

Although students may not be thrilled with the increased enforcement of on-time arrival to school, students and administration can still come to an understanding on tardiness. As one student said, "admin isn't out to get us." ●

Penguin Debaters Address Big Questions at Tournament in Atlanta

By Georgia Murphy ('26)
Staff Writer

Should social media programs be allowed to take down content if they find it inappropriate? What military or financial aid should the US government provide Israel? Why are Biden's approval ratings so low when his record is so high? These were some of the questions the SWW debate team tackled at their debate tournament this past January.

From Friday, Jan. 26 to Sunday, Jan. 28, six Penguin debaters attended the Barkley Forum for High School Students (BFHS) debate tournament at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia.

Since its debut in 1956, BFHS has become one of the most prestigious debate tournaments in the country, attracting debate teams from over 35 states. While the attending SWW debate team was small, they proved their ability to match some of the best Public Forum debaters and extemporaneous speakers in the US.

Mae Tuggle ('26), Lucy Watkins ('27), Katherine O'Brien ('24), and Reia Stock-Heard ('27) participated in the Public Forum category. PF is a difficult event, which involves back-and-forth debate in which two pairs of students argue for opposing sides. A team begins by presenting their case, arguing either the affirmative or negative stance. Then, the opposing team refutes their argument, presenting a block to which the original debaters respond.

In order to succeed in PF, debaters must spend considerable time researching and writing in the preceding months. All of this work served Walls students well in the final competition.

The SWW debaters prepared both an affirmative and negative speech in response to the question, "Should the United States federal government repeal Section 230 of the Communication Decency Act?" Section 230 protects online platforms from being held legally responsible for the information posted on their sites and are protected from lawsuits based on their content moderation policies. This Act is receiving a lot of attention right now because social media platforms are using it to justify censoring their users' posts. Some argue that this censorship violates freedom of speech while others contend that regulating content on social media is a more pressing issue.

Jessie Moss ('26) and Zoe Becker ('26) participated in extemporaneous speech (Editors note: both Moss and Becker write for the Rookery). Extemporaneous speech is

vastly distinct from PF. The competition is completely individual and involves far less research than PF. 30 minutes before each round, each speaker is given an envelope with three speech topics. The speakers then have 30 minutes to prepare a seven-minute speech on one of the topics. The prospect of receiving their issue shortly before debating can be daunting, but debaters are accustomed to the high-pressure situation. Becker said, "once I actually have the question in my hand and I start to prepare, I'd usually fall into a groove ... like 'Okay, I can do this.'"

Becker also said that her pre-tournament work really helped her during those 30 minutes. In preparation for the tournament, the SWW speech debaters consumed as much current media as possible to ensure they had the knowledge to craft their speech. Becker said, "I probably listened to more podcasts than music in the run-up to the tournament." The uncertainty of extemporaneous speech makes the preparation less work-heavy, but potentially more stressful.

After much preparation, SWW debaters flew out to Atlanta with two parent chaperones on Friday, Jan. 26. They stayed two nights in a Marriott Hotel off-campus and Ubered to the tournament each day.

Once the debaters arrived at the actual tournament, they were ready. Becker gave nine speeches in total and ended up making it to the quarterfinals. "This event has

taught me how to work well under pressure better than anything else ... I consider myself a queen of timed-essays because of [it]." Every single SWW debater employed this same quick thinking throughout the tournament.

Marielle Cornes, the SWW debate coach, was not able to attend the trip, but followed her students' performance on the Emory website. She said, "For me, my favorite moment was just being able to check online and see how good my kids were doing." Ms. Cornes worked incredibly hard to ensure the team did the best they could at the tournament, resulting in a lot of success. She said, "This is definitely one of the more difficult tournaments our team goes to, which is why I'm always very impressed and proud with any positive outcomes."

In terms of positive outcomes, Becker ('26) was among the top 10 extemporaneous speakers and received a ceremonial key from the tournament. She said, "This was my first tournament [doing speech] on this level ... and not only did it go well, [but] I really enjoyed myself." Becker is glad she participated in this tournament and plans to continue doing speech debate.

Ms. Cornes is incredibly proud of the whole debate team for fielding this tournament. She said, "I just hope they take it as a learning experience because that's what every debate tournament is: a way to learn more about a topic and get better at the activity." ●



PF Debaters pictured from left: Reia Stock-Heard, Kate O'Brien, Lucy Watkins, Mae Tuggle / Credits: Candice Frost

MPD Reports Shoplifting from CVS by Walls Students

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this will increase racial profiling by police, or even result in arrests of those wearing face coverings for religious reasons.

Another controversial provision allows MPD to temporarily declare certain areas drug-free zones, allowing officers to disperse gatherings of multiple people if they are suspected to be committing a drug crime. Again, Washingtonians have expressed concern that this will lead to racial profiling.

While there are very real concerns regarding the bill, misinformation has also circulated. A post from a civil rights group's Instagram with over 300,000 followers oversimplified the drug-free zone provision by saying that the act will "criminalize gather-

ings of two or more people."

Criticism of the bill meant that the final draft was not as harsh on crime as the original version. The originally proposed bill lowered the threshold for shoplifting to be considered a felony from \$1000 worth of goods stolen to \$500 in an attempt to prevent this rampant problem.

This issue specifically hit close to home for Walls students. Last month, Walls' morning announcements included a message from Principal Sylvia Isaac, who reported that MPD had met with her regarding shoplifting by Walls students at the CVS in Western Market. Ms. Isaac urged students to behave and represent the school well. Some students believe that the announcement has reduced theft at CVS, at least temporarily, and scared

students away from stealing.

With these issues directly affecting Walls students, many have weighed in on the Secure DC bill. Some think it will serve to benefit the community, despite possible problems. "I don't love all the measures in the omnibus," said Ian Springer ('25), "but overall I think Secure DC will make our city safer and better." Stephen Showalter ('24), on the other hand, thought that Secure DC and the DC Council won't have much effect on crime in the near future. "Regardless, it will be a while before the actual crime rates decrease," said Showalter.

Still others think that the act's whole approach is flawed. "I do think it promotes over policing rather than getting to the root cause of our high crime rates," said Eve Rehora ('25).

Only time will tell whether new policies will curb DC's crime problem. ●

PERSPECTIVE

What is the Purpose of the National Honor Society?

By Gabi Goldberg ('25)
Staff Writer

Walls held its 2023-24 National Honor Society induction ceremony on Feb. 27, adding the majority of the class of 2025 to its ranks. The National Honor Society (NHS) was first established in 1921 to recognize exemplary student leadership and achievement. Students apply for membership in the fall of their sophomore year. Yet while the majority of 11th and 12th graders belong to NHS, the benefits of membership remain unclear to many students.

Schools must pay \$385 per year to remain affiliated with NHS, though students at Walls are not required to pay an individual membership fee. In theory, joining NHS opens doors to new opportunities and is rumored to look good on college applications. However, in actuality, membership may not have a meaningful impact. The National Honor Society reflects service and academic prowess, but those qualities are already reflected on students' transcripts in the form of community service hours and GPA.

In recent years, new organizations have formed to potentially compete with the NHS. Many students have received emails from the National Society of High School Scholars (NSHSS). Tara Roberts ('25) said, "I got so tired from the constant emails that I blocked the NSHSS." The NSHSS requires a one-time fee of \$90 to join and a six-month membership fee starting at \$65, higher for silver or gold tier memberships. NSHSS resembles NHS in some regards, but Cole Hoffman ('25) called the programs "a scam," taking advantage of parents and students willing to do anything to pad a college application.

The National Honor Society is normally associated with helping to get students accepted into college. However, Sarah Rice ('24) believes that when colleges were looking at her application, NHS "may not have been the biggest factor because I'm involved in so many activities." On some applications, the National



NHS officers presenting at the NHS induction ceremony / Credits: Nicola Klarfeld

Honor Society just looks rather unexceptional.

Additionally, the Walls chapter is not particularly active to garner attention from colleges. The chapter has only held two community service events this year, both being food drives. The student-led NHS chapter is often deprioritized in favor of other extracurriculars which students are more passionate about.

National Honor Society membership will never look bad on a college application, but it also doesn't necessarily improve chances for admission to top schools. Rice explained that, since such a large percentage of each class is in NHS, membership "may not be the most outstanding factor."

The simplicity of getting into NHS at Walls makes the organization not particularly unique. Abigail McGraw-Traster ('24) remembers that the application "was just a form asking about grades, extracurriculars and

community service projects and you answered the questions and they accepted pretty much everyone."

Vivien Dobrescu ('24) believes that "it's worth it [to join] because it doesn't take long to apply and there are not many responsibilities or time commitments during the year."

Rice would like to see a little more involvement and commitment in the chapter in the future. She had hoped "to see more specific NHS events and more of a presence in Walls this year."

According to the NHS website, the average chapter accomplishes "1000 hours of community/school service, \$26000 in charitable donations . . . 1000 pounds of food to local, state, and national causes and . . . 100 pints of blood." If the Walls chapter were to meet or exceed these averages, membership would likely be a bigger accomplishment. ●

DCPS Must Balance Between Grade Inflation and Graduation Rates

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accelerated the phenomenon across the country. This was likely caused by similar circumstances to those causing DCPS' inflation: liberal grading policies to account for the challenges students faced learning online.

Despite the downsides of grade inflation, many students would prefer to keep the current grading policies. "I don't want [new deadlines for late work]," said Erefu Patel ('25), "I like when teachers don't care how late you do your homework because all that matters is if you understand the material." Patel also felt that with lots of other schools having lenient policies, a harsh policy change would make it more difficult for Walls students to compete for college admissions.

"However, teachers don't necessarily not care when students turn in work late, even if DCPS policy requires them to accept it," science teacher Adam Vrooman said, "what becomes challenging for me as an instructor to manage sometimes is the volume of work that comes in at the end of the advisory." Though it may be a reprieve for students, their reliance on the lenient policies can create burdens for teachers.

Mr. Vrooman added that this can end up hurting students as well. "Some students experience a lot of stress and angst around completing many assignments at the very end or having assignments build up and not having that sense

of time management ... become of the ability to turn in work at a very late time," Mr. Vrooman said.

Ganesh Bhojwani ('24) echoed Patel, prioritizing learning over timeliness: "The current grading policy is a fair policy that focuses primarily on the actual learning of students rather than arbitrary deadlines."

"Allowing students to submit work late and at their own pace allows for greater equality of work in comparison to the rushed half-effort assignments submitted prior to the current policy." Bhojwani added, "Harsher deadlines force students to drop their extracurriculars and limits their growth both as people and students. DCPS enacting stricter guidelines sends a message that they don't see the value in learning outside of traditional curriculum.

Mr. Vrooman agreed that there are some advantages to the current grading policy. "There's some good aspects regarding the opportunities for revision because we know that as a learner growing and developing revision and feedback ... is important" he said.

However, he pointed out that doing work late doesn't necessarily help students learn while in class, saying "I see students struggling on the check for understandings and benchmark assessments as they have not done the practice and then... [have] to do practice for work they've already been assessed on." This is an inconvenient outcome that many students

who have turned work in late have come across.

Seojin Kim ('25), too, didn't see the current policy as an issue, but did take issue with the fact that the current policy "isn't always enforced super consistently ... some teachers have their own deadlines on when retakes can be done and when late work is submitted."

There are some students who are more open to a change, though. Pablo Salazar ('25) acknowledged that the current policy inflates grades and supported a less lenient policy. On the topic of the introduction of new late work deadlines, Salazar said, "I think that it is a fair decision although it will take some getting used to by everyone."

Grade inflation isn't the only worrying number DCPS is dealing with, though. The 4-year graduation rate of DCPS students remains relatively low at 75.3%, according to the Office of the State Superintendent of Education's 2023 School Report Card. While Walls tends to be focused on As vs Bs and getting students into the best colleges, many other DCPS schools are primarily focused on simply getting students to graduate. While attempting to counter grade inflation, DCPS will have to be careful to not worsen the already low graduation rates.

At this point, the details of DCPS' possible grading policy amendments are unclear. But with the issues plaguing DCPS and Walls, it seems change will be coming soon. ●

Walls Once Hosted Many Exchange Students Every Year: What Happened?

By Rachel Kolko ('24)
Senior Editor

In 2020, 12 exchange students from around the world walked the School Without Walls hallways, played on Walls' sports teams, and explored the city with their native Washingtonian friends. When the pandemic hit, these students were abruptly sent home. Since then, Walls has only hosted one exchange student. He may have been the last one.

For decades, relying on Walls' partnerships with organizations like the American Field Service (AFS), students traveled from around the globe to take their place in the Walls classroom each year.

Exchange students would typically come to Walls for the entirety of their junior or senior year to take classes alongside other Penguins, while staying with a local host family.

"It's really great to be able to get the chance to meet someone from another culture, and to not only meet them but to become close with them," said physics teacher Harrison Davis, who graduated from Walls in 2014.

Before the pandemic, Walls was one of the most popular schools in D.C. for hosting exchange students. When Mr. Davis was a senior, Walls had 16 exchange students come through AFS alone. Former Walls Principal Richard Trogisch "was a very strong proponent of exchange," said Kathryn Moore, class of 2024 counselor and former exchange student counselor, "so he would accept as many [students] as possible."

During his senior year, Mr. Davis got to know a handful of the 16 exchange students well.

He befriended two of the students, one from Spain and the other from Belgium, through his crew team. "Oh, the music they listen to, oh man," he recalled, "the two of them were really into EDM and I remember them showing us so much of this European music scene that we'd never heard about, like music festivals that they'd go to back home and all this cool stuff."



Thongsongkrit (upper row, fourth from right) and McFarlane (bottom row, right) played on the rec soccer team known as the "Gremlins" together / Via Daniel McFarlane

Music was only one of the many things Mr. Davis learned from his international peers. "One of them actually was a close friend of mine," he said. "We had dinner at my house at one time and my mom does a lot of work in Eastern Europe, and he was from the Czech Republic, so they had a lot of conversations about food in the Czech Republic, which was pretty amusing."

One of Mr. Davis' students, Daniel McFarlane ('24) had a similar experience with exchange students — eight years later. Throughout his life, McFarlane's family has hosted three exchange students, two of whom attended Walls for a year, including Napat Thongsongkrit.

Napat "Pat" Thongsongkrit may likely have been the last exchange student Walls will ever host. Coming all the way from Bangkok, Thailand, for the 2022-2023 school year, Thongsongkrit was the only exchange student to attend Walls that year, and the first one since the

pandemic.

"I thought it was kind of interesting, like, the year before COVID [2018-2019] I think there were like seven AFS students," McFarlane said. Post-pandemic, it was a different story. "We had to kind of fight for just one AFS student to come to Walls."

McFarlane described the overall experience positively, explaining that he welcomed Thongsongkrit into his family. "It was like having a brother of the same age as me from a different country for a year." When McFarlane went to Florida to visit family, Thongsongkrit went with them. "Even if I didn't want to get close with him, it would have been difficult [not to]."

Along with McFarlane, lots of other Walls students got to know Thongsongkrit. "Pat had a lot of friends in our class," McFarlane said.

Exchange Students continued on page 8

Summer Study Abroad: What to Know

By Zoe Fisher ('25)
News Editor

Many students view summer study abroad programs as an opportunity to explore their dream destinations, pursue an interest, or simply enhance their college application. These programs are often expensive and a large time commitment, leaving students to wonder if these programs are worth the investment.

Walls students who have participated in study abroad say that study abroad programs can be a mixed bag. The location, company, and co-student travelers are all variables that can transform one's study abroad experience.

The main component that can make or break a trip is the other people in the program. This past summer, Seojin Kim ('25) went to Barcelona for three weeks to study Spanish language and culture with Putney Student Travel, a high school study abroad company unassociated with Walls. Her experience left much to be desired. She explained there were good parts of the program, but, "there were enough things that were iffy that I don't think I could recommend it to someone in good conscience." Kim explained how her peers and instructors disrespected the locals in various ways. "One night, kids from across the hall were throwing rocks



Sophie Schneider and fellow students in her program / Via @cieeberlin on Instagram

at people on the street," Kim shared. Furthermore, a student in her program made fun of the locals in his final presentation for not driving more. This was in part made possible by the instructors' inattention toward student behavior. Cyrus Powell ('25) had the opposite experience. He studied business and entrepreneurship in Berlin with CIEE, a study abroad program that has an established relationship with Walls.

Powell loved his experience. "The opportunity to go explore a brand-new city with smart, interesting, and fun kids your age was extremely gratifying and felt like a small taste

of what college might be like," he said. After his morning classes, Powell had freedom to explore the city with his peers and create "life-long friendships." The ability to develop long-lasting relationships is primarily dependent on the program and group. However, getting to go to a new place alongside people with shared interests can help create a strong and unique bond.

One clear indicator of the type of students in a program is the price. Many of the CIEE and Putney Student Travel programs can cost anywhere from \$5,000 to \$8,000. Most study abroad programs have scholarships, but the price can still give a clue to the amount of privilege students may have at home.

"The majority of the people on the trip were very well-off private school kids," Kim explained. She attributes this to their lack of respect for culture, as she claimed they lacked some worldly perspective.

Sophie Schneider ('25) also traveled to Berlin to study German language and culture with CIEE this past summer. Schneider explained, "Studying abroad is undeniably a privilege, so everyone in my program had some degree of privilege, but there was still diversity and variety in perspectives among the people I met." She found that this was crucial in making her experience so positive as she was able to learn from — and create deeper relationships with — her peers.

Similarly to Schneider, Powell said, "the students in my group seemed really humble and

Study Abroad continued on page 8

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Voices of the Morning Announcements

By Leah Levy ('25)
Staff Writer

Every morning at the start of second period, students hear the click of the intercom followed by, "Good morning, School Without Walls!" The student volunteer for the morning announcements then shares upcoming club meetings, sports games, fundraisers, and other important events. Although any student can volunteer to deliver the morning announcements, there are a few students who have taken it upon themselves to become regular announcers.

Nardos Jebril ('25) signs up to do the announcements five times a month, Felicia Ogundimu ('26) does them once a week, and Hugo Rosen ('24) does them twice a week.

"I just write my name when there are spaces left" on the sign-up sheet, Ogundimu explained. She really enjoys volunteering for the

morning announcements, saying it helps her "start off the morning nicely." Ogundimu also mentioned that this fuels her public speaking skills and that occasionally missing a few minutes of class is a bonus as well.

For Rosen, who started announcing in the middle of his junior year, the morning announcements became a habit. "At first it just seemed fun, then I realized that a lot of the time the spots aren't filled, so I thought, why not?" He observed that when there are no volunteers, administration may not share the announcements that day.

Jebril has also noticed this trend, and stressed how easy it is for students to volunteer. "You just go up to the front office and there's a form with the days and slots for you to sign your name."

These frequent student volunteers have found many benefits in doing the morning announcements. They especially believe it is a good way to connect with the community. Ogundimu emphasized that, "People are just going to know you more, you'll make more friends." Students who routinely do the morning announcements do tend to be known for it, since they share their name and add some per-

sonal flair to the script.

Jebril would like to see more creative expression and student input. "I wish administration would allow more jokes or something funny because that way we could actually get the school engaged in the announcements."

Jebril believes that giving announcers more creative freedom would help correct the low level of student interest in the announcements. Many students ignore the commentary, a problem that the student announcers would like to fix. Rosen said that, in ignoring the announcements, students may miss an important club or extracurricular opportunity. Jebril agrees that they are valuable for staying informed on upcoming student events, such as, "sports, bake sales, club events, or other really important announcements."

The morning announcements are a daily part of Walls life and a valuable resource to keep students informed. These student morning announcement volunteers play an important role in keeping the announcements fun and familiar.

To conclude in the words of Rosen, "These have been your morning announcements!" ●

How Should You Cite AI in Your Essays?

By Zoe Becker ('26)
Staff Writer

From sophomore speeches to senior projects to even Rookery articles, there has been a lot of buzz around artificial intelligence at Walls lately, and for good reason. Generative AI tools have the potential to reshape the way students learn. Despite all the buzz, many students are still in the dark about how they should and can be using AI. Walls' AI policies, however, are not as complicated as they seem.

Walls' new AI policy, introduced by department heads this school year, requires students to "cite AI like any other source," in order to ensure academic honesty and integrity.

The problem is that AI isn't like any other source; it has the ability to generate unique ideas and text, in addition to offering information.

Humanities teacher Ginea Briggs clarified that asking ChatGPT for inspiration for a project is considered "a perfectly legitimate use of AI" and doesn't have to be cited. For example, if students are conducting a debate and want argument ideas, they can refer to AI tools as a starting point.

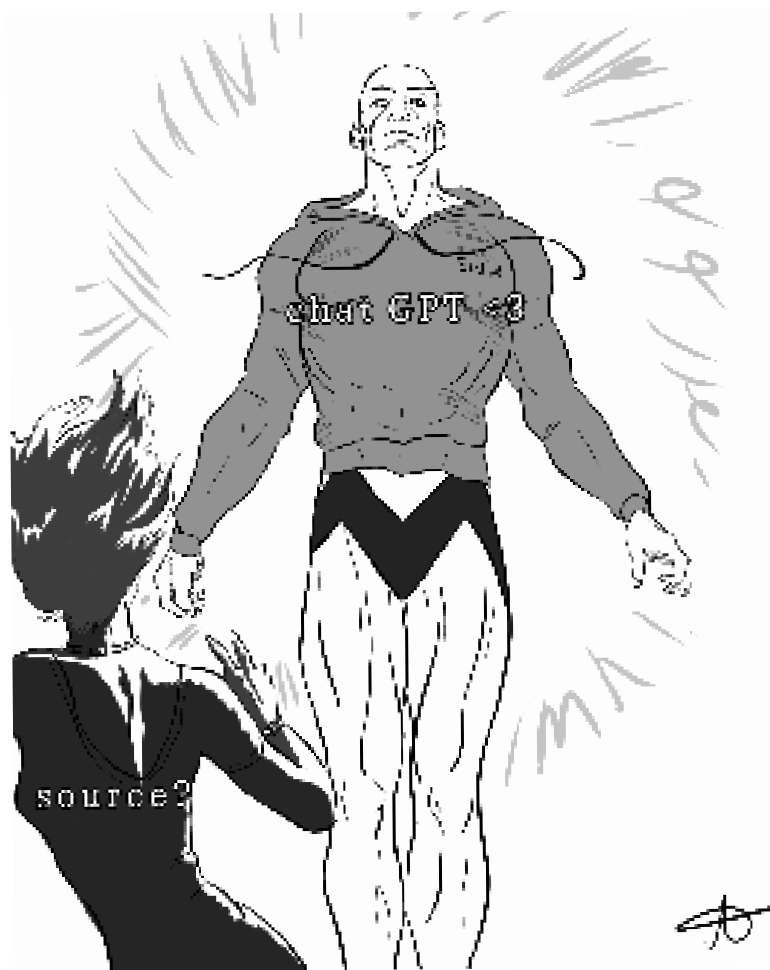
In fact, Ms. Briggs even encouraged students to use AI to take the step of asking for inspiration when they're feeling stuck on a particular assignment and to ask simple questions that they might otherwise ask their teacher about, such as about grammatical styles.

Walls students, too, are permitted to use tools like Grammarly which utilize AI in order to make minor syntactic and grammatical edits. While Ms. Briggs warned against using generative AI programs like ChatGPT for research purposes as they're notorious for feeding users inaccurate information, she highlighted that there's no prohibition against doing so and recognized that using a chatbot for research can help students save valuable time.

"A student was talking to me about The Manhattan Project," she said, suggesting that the student could ask a generative AI tool to, "give me background about the Manhattan project."

"I would prefer if they used another source," she added, "but I can see a student doing that, in which case they would need to cite it."

Generative AI programs have a tendency to "hallucinate," a phenomenon in which the AI simply makes up information as a result of a variety of factors including the way it was



"ChatGPT" by Ayele Gousseva

prompted.

If, for example, a student were to ask ChatGPT why the Manhattan Project occurred during World War I (instead of when it actually did, during World War II) the AI might not point out the error and instead invent information in order to answer the student's question. Students should ask more open-ended questions in order to avoid suggesting inaccurate answers.

Additionally, as with any other research, students should briefly cross-check information they find through AI with other sources.

Actually creating a citation for AI is fairly simple. There is already a Chicago and APA standard for how to cite AI sources and while AI citations have not been added formally to the list most recent edition of MLA, a current advisory instructed writers "to adapt [existing] guidelines to fit the situation," and offered recommendations on how to cite AI.

Based on current MLA advisory, a citation for a ChatGPT conversation about the Manhattan Project would look like this: "Give me background on the Manhattan Project" prompt.

ChatGPT, 26 Mar. GPT 3.5, OpenAI, 26 Mar. 2024, chat.openai.com/chat.

In the citation, the prompt given to the generative AI should serve as the title, the AI itself (i.e. ChatGPT) is the container, the company which owns the AI serves as the publisher, and no author information is included.

Still, there are restrictions on AI use. Students can't use AI for research in all contexts. While in a Humanities class, AI tools are acceptable if cited properly, that's not the case in AP classes, where Walls students are prohibited from using a tool like ChatGPT to generate analysis for them.

Ms. Briggs, who teaches AP Research, stated that, "The College Board however made it absolutely clear that any analysis must be student analysis and that you are not allowed to use AI."

The College Board lays out stringent regulations stating that students must interact with primary and secondary sources directly, instead of bypassing these sources by using AI for information or asking AI sources to synthesize existing material. ●

Study Abroad is 'Life-Changing'

Study Abroad continued from page 6

d down-to-earth. Although most were wealthy, they never let it influence how they acted or treated others.”

The next important factor in making or breaking a study abroad trip is the subject matter. All three students said they did not enjoy the “school” part of studying abroad as much as they had hoped. Both Powell and Schneider referenced the, “rigid daily structure” of their program. Powell explained that at times he was annoyed “to wake up early to go to class like if you were back in school.”

Kim and Schneider each studied language and culture in their respective countries. Kim said, “there wasn’t much actual speaking Spanish being done.” Most of the students in her program were ready to be immersed in the language, so the classes were disappointing as more English than Spanish was spoken.

Schneider also was not challenged by the German classes provided by CIEE. She was already nearly fluent in the language, so her less experienced peers held her back. Schneider continued, “I did not feel particularly immersed in the local culture ... I felt very much like a tourist. But my host family was amazing, and they gave me some insight into daily life.” Her host family is what made the trip meaningful, according to Schneider. Kim was not with a host family, which made it much more challenging for her to practice the language and embrace the culture as Schneider did.

“Studying abroad broadened my perspectives by giving me insight into different peoples lives, beliefs and attitudes, but it was also a fun way to spend my summer,” shared Schneider. She would definitely recommend it to another student, especially a program with a host family.

Powell concluded that study abroad is “an absolutely life-changing experience, and you are almost guaranteed to have a blast while doing it. The memories I got from my trip are going to stick with me forever, and I’m extremely grateful I signed up for it.” ●



Schneider traveled to Berlin to study German language and culture / Via @cieeberlin on Instagram

Sarah Ruiz ('17): Reflections of a Walls Alum

By Sarah Ruiz ('17)
Guest Writer

I am a proud D.C. Native and Latina graduate of the class of 2017. Throughout my time at Walls, I learned to take every opportunity that came my way. I knew that being an educated Latina and challenging myself academically would benefit my future.

One of my favorite opportunities while being a student was traveling abroad to Colombia and Finland with AFS (American Field Service) during the summer of my sophomore year. I also traveled to Ecuador through the DCPS Study Abroad program in the summer of my junior year.

All these experiences were on scholarships I applied for with well-written essays and interviews. My family did not have the money to pay for me to travel abroad but whenever I saw an opportunity to travel for free in the Walls newsletter, I knew to take a chance and apply.

I loved learning about cultures and engaging with the foreign exchange students and my peers of diverse cultures. My first

piece of advice for you is to not feel discouraged if you cannot afford to travel abroad on a class trip or during the summer. There are always travel scholarships and you never know which ones you might end up getting. Traveling taught me to become more independent and curious about other cultures and languages.

I was also a dancer/co-captain of the B.O.M.B. Squad and a member of the Latino Club. These were my outlets to not stress about schoolwork and make new friends. Make sure you get involved and find an activity you enjoy. School is much more than just going to class and doing your homework.

Academically, I loved all my humanities classes because I genuinely love to write and found all the content interesting. Reading and writing will never leave your life and will be important when you go to college, so take those classes seriously now.

I know many students dislike the amount of homework, Sophomore Speech, and Senior Project to name a few. However,

Sarah Ruiz continued on page 9

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Exchange Students

Exchange Students continued from page 6

“From what I know, people were able to learn a lot about Thailand, where he’s from, and I was also able to learn a lot.”

In fact, McFarlane said he learned from all of the exchange students his family hosted. “I think having exchange students at schools can be really helpful, just as a way to exchange culture.” In 2014, his family hosted Jax, a student from China, who spent the school year at Washington Latin Public Charter School. “He taught us how to make dumplings.” McFarlane said. “It was a pretty extensive process, but that was a lot of fun, like, spending a day just making dumplings with him.”

Jaap, the Dutch student they hosted in 2018, taught him about the significance of field hockey in the Netherlands.

Learning these kinds of details was one of the main reasons Walls used to host so many students, Ms. Moore explained. “That was sort of part of Walls’ mission, right, to create global citizens,” she said. “Our students could learn about the [exchange students’] culture, their country, and then [they would] hopefully also inspire our students to do exchanges after-

ward.”

But with a recent DCPS policy change, Walls students may never get another chance to experience this cultural exchange

“[The policy change] basically said that we could not accept exchange students without exhausting our waitlist,” Ms. Moore said. She theorized that DCPS did not want to set aside a number of spots in the Walls classroom for exchange students that could be going to D.C. residents. For the class of 2027, the waitlist to get into Walls was approximately 1,850 students long.

But, even with this restrictive policy, there still may be a way for exchange students to come to Walls. “I guess in theory, a student — if they were placed early enough with a host family — in theory, I believe they could go through the same admissions process [as D.C. applicants],” Ms. Moore said. Still, she said it was unlikely. “They’re not placed that early in the process to then be able to go through the typical admissions process.”

To complete the admissions process through MySchoolDC, prospective exchange students would have to start the application process in December — about seven months before they would move in for their exchange year. For comparison, most exchange students used to apply only a few weeks before the start of their exchange year.

“It’s unfortunate,” Ms. Moore said. “[But] I

understand the policy. I’d understand if I was a parent with a child on the waitlist.”

McFarlane offered a compromise. “I think hosting a couple of exchange students (maybe three or four per year) would be a great way to give everyone ideas about spending time abroad,” he said. “I had a great time being Pat’s host brother and it seemed like a lot of other people at Walls valued having Pat in the community. DCPS is definitely missing out by making it impossible for exchange students to attend certain schools.”

The exchange students Walls did get to host have left lasting impacts on the community.

“They kept in touch, and you know, some of them would even come back.” Ms. Moore said.

McFarlane says he still keeps in touch with Thongsongkrit, and even sees Jaap, the Dutch exchange student, in person annually. Mr. Davis still follows some of the exchange students from his class on Facebook. He is also sad to see the change in policy.

“We talked so much about how this school has got this humanities focus and we’re global citizens, and part of doing that right is meeting people from other places,” he said. “[Seeing] how you’re similar to or different from these people and, and celebrating those things, so I think it’s a big loss.” ●

PERSPECTIVES

What Do Jackson-Reed Students Think of Walls?

Compiled by Sara Weinrod ('24) *editor-in-chief* and Maia Riggs ('25) *staff writer* with special thanks to Jeffrey Clarke ('24) and Max Eller ('24)



Jackson-Reed High School, located in Tenleytown / Credits: Adam Chilbert

Jackson-Reed. The recently-christened name inspires fear, hostility, annoyance, and perhaps a twinge of admiration into the hearts of most Walls students. This inter-scholastic rivalry has been a widespread source of friendly competition for countless years. At least, that's how it appears to us from within our Foggy Bottom bubble. As it happens, students from Jackson-Reed do not necessarily view us as a rival the way we think they do. We asked Jackson-Reed students what they thought of our school.

(Disclaimer: Responses are all in good fun)

What is your general impression of Walls as a school?	What does the stereotypical Walls student look like/dress like?	How does the stereotypical Walls student behave?
<p><i>"Super academic, no social life, odd balls, introverted"</i> - Emma Ludgin</p>	<p><i>"Normal"</i> - Martin Welles</p>	<p><i>"A bit nerdy and they are all strangely close."</i> - Harrison Ertz</p>
<p><i>"Walls doesn't strike me as a typical high school"</i> - Martin Welles</p>	<p><i>"Skinny jeans and a flannel"</i> - Emma Ludgin</p>	<p><i>"Maturely"</i> - Eddie McKenna</p>
<p><i>"Walls doesn't strike me as a typical high school"</i> - Martin Welles</p>	<p><i>"I just imagine slightly nerd like but normal"</i> - Harison Ertz</p>	<p><i>"Dramatic, loves to complain about workload despite choosing to go to a school known for its workload."</i> - Elijah Kirkpatrick</p>
<p><i>"I think it's a goof school, I feel that it's a lil culty though."</i> - Harrison Ertz</p>	<p><i>"Unique, everyone I know dresses in a lot of different ways"</i> - Elijah Kirkpatrick</p>	<p><i>"Incredibly nice, interesting, and genuinely considerate"</i> - Anonymous</p>
<p><i>"Academically rigorous"</i> - Gavin Fletcher</p>	<p><i>"Average 2018-2019 style"</i> - Bernard</p>	<p>How do you see the Walls-Jackson-Reed rivalry? Do you see us as rivals?</p>
<p><i>"Competitive"</i> - Teresa Jimenez</p>	<p><i>"the same as any kids our age maybe a little more like alt indie"</i> - Arden</p>	<p><i>"No, Sidwell and St. John's are our rivals"</i> - Martin Welles</p>
<p><i>"It seems like a lot of work for no reason. People are cool though."</i> - Maya Roskes</p>	<p><i>"I think it's very similar to Jackson-Reed like athletic wear or baggy jeans, sweaters, graphic t shirts, etc."</i> - Will Schwendinger</p>	<p><i>"No, maybe only for girls soccer"</i> - Emma Ludgin</p>
<p><i>"Walls is a school for geeks. The only sport they're good at is Ultimate Frisbee, and even then Jackson-Reed still comes out on top"</i> - Adler Amolsch</p>	<p><i>"They dress like old money people"</i> - Teresa Jimenez</p>	<p><i>"No definitely not"</i> - Andreas Jackson</p>
<p><i>"Doing too much"</i> - Liam Floman</p>	<p><i>"They got mid style I ain't gon lie except for Aaron he tuff"</i> - Nico Owen</p>	<p><i>"Absolutely not, you guys aren't good enough at sports to be athletic rivals"</i> - Elijah Kirkpatrick</p>
<p><i>"Limits the development of its students as individuals"</i> - Sebastian Rosen</p>	<p><i>"They got mid style I ain't gon lie except for Aaron he tuff"</i> - Nico Owen</p>	<p><i>"I think the rivalry may be one-sided"</i> - Liam Floman</p>
<p><i>"I think it's a good school with lots of opportunity for their students. Smaller with great academics."</i> - Will Schwendinger</p>	<p><i>"I don't see it as a rivalry. I think some may consider it one because their friends go [Jackson-Reed] and they want to be better than them."</i> - Eddie McKenna</p>	<p><i>"I don't see it as a rivalry. I think some may consider it one because their friends go [Jackson-Reed] and they want to be better than them."</i> - Eddie McKenna</p>

Admittedly, our sports rivalry with Jackson-Reed may be a bit one-sided. According to its own students, Jackson-Reed is rivals with Sidwell and St. Johns, not us. The only question left to ask is, do Sidwell and St. Johns know that? ●

Words of Wisdom from Sarah Ruiz, Class of 2017

Sarah Ruiz continued from page 8

these assignments prepare you for college and will be something you experience again during college. Do not be afraid to visit your teachers during their office hours. When I did both my undergraduate and graduate degrees, everything flowed much better for me since I knew how to write a 15 page-paper and discovered ways of staying organized and turning in assignments on time.

Walls is filled with opportunities such

as early college exposure and more. Every lesson and experience will help you grow professionally. My time at Walls has taught me to always speak up for myself, to make meaningful connections and to not let anyone limit what you are capable of. When you need help, ask for it. Your teachers, counselors and administration are there for you. Whenever I struggled with my math and science classes, I stayed during office hours and even went to tutoring to make sure my grades did not drop.

I hope this piece of encouragement and a small bit of my experience motivates you all to keep pushing forward at this stage in your life. When you graduate with your high school diploma, all those tears of staying up doing homework and balancing extracurriculars will pay off.

If you would like to get in contact with me to ask me about any career, school, life after Walls feel free to connect with me via email: sarahjyr100@gmail.com. ●

Walls Insulates Us From Current Events. It Should Do the Opposite.

By Jessie Moss ('26)
Staff Writer

Israel and Hamas are fighting a war. Tens of thousands have died, with thousands more wounded, displaced, or held hostage. These are facts that we see reposted across social media and displayed against the side of bus stops. They're also facts the Walls community refuses to acknowledge.

Since the October 7th attack and the conflict that followed, I observed only one discussion led by a teacher at Walls about the Israel-Hamas war. That discussion was on October 10th, and since then, I've not seen any such discussions facilitated by teachers. Even The Rookery has been reluctant to discuss the war with all of its tensions and nuances, in contrast with the Jackson-Reed newspaper, The Beacon. In front page article, Jackson-Reed assistant principal Mark Minsker described the impact of this international conflict on the school as unprecedented.

When considering how Walls has addressed these issues, many students have noticed a similar pattern of non-communication, paralleling our newspaper's silence.

"[No one] in school talks about [the Israel-Hamas war]," said Naomi Nassar ('25). "I feel informed just because my family talks about all this stuff. But I wouldn't go to school and know about it because of that."

For Anna Mayer ('25), the avoidance of current events feels broader than a class-by-class decision. "I don't think any [teacher] in particular avoids current events," she said, "I think there's just this general culture of neglecting to discuss what is actually impacting students."

Walls insulates students from sensitive issues, regardless of their impact on our student body. Teachers should do the opposite for two reasons. First, they should consider where students get their news, if not from school. And second, they should consider how discussing these topics would help students engage further in critical thinking.

But, of course, incorporating current events isn't that simple. "[Teachers] don't want it to be in their class that a student gets into a fight or a student breaks down in tears, because of what they're



The Jackson-Reed Beacon, unlike the Rookery, has confronted the Israel-Palestine conflict / Credits: David Sips

talking about," explained Mayer. "I think their instinct is to avoid the conversations entirely."

For Niamh O'Donovan ('25), this education has also been lacking. "A lot of teachers I've talked to about [the Israel-Hamas war] tend to shut down emotionally-charged issues," they explained. And the implications of neglecting such crucial topics are tangible.

"I think it is hard for teachers to discuss it because it is such an emotionally-charged crisis with many people have personal connections to the outcome," explained Walls performing arts teacher, Ms. Z.

"I think teachers' avoidance of these discussions is understandable, because they don't want to get in trouble," O'Donovan hypothesized. "But it's not an excuse to not educate us about what's happening."

While this concern is legitimate, we need to investigate where it comes from.

"So we're in survival mode, when it comes to how we educate students," said Mayer.

The silence on these issues is problematic as Walls mistakenly take for granted that its stu-

dents are well-informed. The reality is sadly far from. Walls students are exceptionally motivated, but that does not mean they always have sufficient understanding of current events.

"Being informed feels like a big task for me a lot of the time," O'Donovan said. "I get a lot of my information from friends and from social media."

"There are a lot of informed people here," said Mayer. "I also think there are a lot of misinformed people."

"We have so much work," said Ethan Crawford ('26), "which prevents us from spending our own time researching or looking at articles." Because the rigor of the Walls courseload interferes with students' abilities to follow the news, Walls has an obligation to educate students in the classroom.

After Hamas' October 7th attack on Israel, only one of my teachers addressed the emerging conflict. Ms. Blessing spent the entirety of our AP World History period teaching us about the

Current Events continued on page 12

Can AI Create Art?

By Julia Serebrisky ('27)
Staff Writer

As AI technology advances, it has become increasingly discussed in educational settings. Many students and educators have used ChatGPT and various other AI tools for academic purposes. Whether it's coming up with essay titles, drafting an email, or fixing grammar mistakes, AI has saved time and improved the quality of work with just a few clicks.

With these technological advancements, OpenAI (the company that owns ChatGPT) was quick to launch their program, DALL-E — a generative model that can create images. The program is capable of creating diverse and creative visual outputs solely based on textual prompts. While teachers of humanities-based subjects have struggled with large language models like ChatGPT, teachers in art departments have similarly had to grapple with AI-generated art.

Walls art teacher Jason Bulluck said that he is decently familiar with the concept of AI art, and has recently been doing more research on the topic. What most intrigues him, however, is the utilization of AI art as a "rigor mirror." As he described it, art produced through AI is "pretty mediocre stuff, so it would be interesting to see how you distinguish your art from AI" and "it would be really cool to respond to that as a teacher."

Moreover, the connection between a person and their artwork is deeply interlinked, and while the AI could create a response to any prompt, the artist or viewer will not have the same level of sentimental attachment or emotional reaction to the work. However, Mr. Bulluck has grown to "actually appreciate AI," explaining that it brings new perspectives to people.

Mr. Bulluck added that while teaching at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, he had a grad student, Rebecca Mott, who created her own AI engine, roughly a year before ChatGPT had been released. Mott did not ask

for permission, but he says he wasn't mad because "she made her own AI. She didn't borrow it," and thus "it is art."

Xander Webb ('24), wrote his senior project paper on AI art. Webb believes that AI art could have a massive impact on education curricula, and said that "we are quickly approaching a world where AI is integrated into nearly every part of our lives . . . [Schools] will begin integrating curriculum based on the functions, uses, and potential of AI to educate the newer generation in using technology that would further our civilization."

AI Art continued on page 12



The artwork on the left was created by an AP art student, while the artwork on the right was created by the text-to-image model DALL-E. Each image was created as a response to the same prompt "vitality." / Credits: Rose Appenzeller and DALL-E

Art on the Walls

Art showcase continued from page 2

And, some students' short films and digital works are still being displayed following the show on monitors located on the basement and third floor level.

The showcase was a thrilling moment for some of Walls' many student artists. "You could tell the students were very excited, many of them not having previously had the opportunity to show off their work," said NAHS chapter president Ishan Hsu ('24).

The display and enjoyment of all of these works would have been impossible without the NAHS team. "It's entirely student-run," said chapter advisor Jason Bulluck.

Hsu, Elise Rundlet ('24), and Tess Usher ('24) served as the primary curatorial team for the event, collaborating with other members and officers of NAHS. Together, they worked to select the works to put on display, as well as to determine where and how to display them; a significant challenge and accomplishment in a building like Walls, which was certainly not designed to be an

art gallery.

Hsu also worked with NAHS co-president Petra Debelack ('24) to plan logistics and advertise the event.

What the team brought to life was remarkable, especially considering that by the time the group had come to a final decision to make this year's showcase happen, they had just around a week and a half to plan and execute the whole thing. "I would add some more time for the next one," said NAHS archivist Rachel Kolko ('24).

Despite the time crunch, come Tuesday the 12th, the third floor was packed with visitors milling through the show. Attendees gave rave reviews of the wide ranging and dynamic showcase.

"I think it was really cool that there were so many mediums showcased at the event," Lei said, "There was film, photography, textile design, and so many other art forms that I didn't even know Walls kids could partake in."

With such a positive reception to its recent event, things seem to be on the up and up for the Walls NAHS, which is already beginning to tentatively plan its next show for later this year. Members are hoping to elevate the museum-like experience by be-

ginning to include placards about art works and create a generally more structured atmosphere to the event.

Kolko further noted that the organization is interested in collaborating with Walls' stage band or jazz bands to play at their events (rather than pre-recorded music) and create a more robust artistic environment at Walls.

Mr. Bulluck, too, has hopes for the future of the chapter. "Because it's student run," he said, shows only happen "if that's a thing they prioritize." While the showcases have often been annual, "I'm hoping it will become more of a semiannual thing," he said.

The NAHS encourages any and all student artists to submit work for display or sale at their future events. And for students who want to get more involved, Walls students can qualify for and become members of the NAHS through excellence in any Walls art class. Membership, according to the NAHS's website, is based on "scholarship, service, and character."

NAHS meetings, which are open to all Walls students regardless of membership, are on Wednesdays at 3:30 in room 27. ●

PERSPECTIVES • COMPILED BY TILLIE FREED ('24)

Navigating High School Romance: Teachers Share Their Wisdom

Whether in a relationship, romanticizing a hallway crush, or happily (or unhappily) single, most high school students could use some relationship advice.

While teenagers gravitate towards asking their friends for advice, they would benefit immensely from a mature and experienced point of view. Walls teachers are here to offer wisdom on the possibilities and pitfalls of high school romance.

Starting a relationship

Students can be nervous to branch out and explore options when it comes to dating. Statistics teacher Pedro Zara shared some wisdom imparted to him by his older brother. "If someone asks you out, you can just say yes, because you have nothing to lose. And, worst case scenario, it's not that interesting [of] a date ... If it doesn't work out, you may find a friend."

Balancing relationships with life

Many students struggle to split their time between their partner and other commitments such as school, extracurriculars, or friendships. Math teacher Kristen Kelly recognizes that often students can get "too bogged down with [relationships]."

Ms. Kelly said, "you think this is like some deep, serious, intense thing and then you're all emotional and you can't focus and your friends have to console you and it becomes a whole thing. Nobody wants to deal with that."

She recommends creating some separation, "don't do everything together, have some of your own activities." She emphasizes that the point of a relationship is to "enhance your time not hurt [it]."

Science teacher Arthur Klawender recognized the time investment dilemma, but said it should not be a reason to not pursue relationships. "I mean, if we want to make it statistical, it's another time commitment. But a pretty big part of being a person is being with someone or finding someone. I think that's as important as the other things."

PDA

PDA remains a controversial issue, especially in a school environment. History teacher Victoria Tyson said "I often think PDA might be a sign of insecurity you have in your relationship. So it depends on the reason why."

Ms. Tyson also noted how PDA, which



By Penelope Morris

makes a relationship publicly obvious, could create awkwardness within a closed social environment in the event of a break up. "This is a really small school, and savvy people think, 'suppose this comes to an end at this really small school.'"

Ms. Kelly had a simple request: "I don't want to see you sitting on anyone's lap."

Dates, anniversaries, and holidays

Students stress over the expectations of Valentine's Day, birthdays, and anniversaries but according to teachers, it's not that deep.

"A fancy dinner in DC, would be what? 200 to 300 dollars. That's not high school stuff," said Mr. Klawender, "Nobody has any money, just do something sweet."

Ms. Kelly also noted that flashy celebrations and presents do not ensure a flourishing relationship. "You should be appreciated every day, not on one day," she said.

Break-Ups

Mr. Zara emphasized the importance of

giving grace to yourself and your partner to change and grow up, "Part of it is understanding that any high schooler doesn't exactly know who they are yet. Understanding that whoever you're with may change a fair amount as you're with them," he said.

In that regard, change can lead to problems in a relationship. Mr. Zara suggests students should recognize that "things going bad is not your fault," since everyone is still growing.

Mr. Zara noted that high school is a good time "to just figure out what you're looking for and what kind of people you like or don't like," — not find a long term partner.

Ms. Tyson also added that it's important to be gracious to your ex, "Never talk negatively about your ex, because that only makes you look bad. And then when you get back together, as often happens in high school, you're embarrassed."

Have fun!

The one sentiment teachers agreed upon was the importance of having fun and learning about yourself.

"Fin[d] someone you have fun with," Mr. Klawender suggested. "I'm assuming that would mean you have things in common and you like each other."

Ms. Kelly's keystone advice is to "realize you're in high school ... you still have to remember you have things to learn so it should be fun. Like why would it be heavy? It should be fun."

At the end of the day it is important to remember that no one is perfect, especially in high school. Ms. Kelly admitted she went against her own advice when she was younger and "was terrible at dating in high school."

And if you have yet to be in a relationship or are currently single, Mr. Klawender reminds everyone not to stress because "there'll be time later on." ●

“Israel” and “Palestine” Should Not Be Words that Send Schools Running

Current Events continued from page 10.

fraught history of Palestine and Israel. The discussion was hugely important because it informed many students of the context for one of the world’s most enduring conflicts.

Still, the discussion involved large oversimplifications both because of the nuances of the subject and many students’ complete lack of prior knowledge—a condition which is completely understandable given that students who do not actively seek out headlines are not receiving a current events education at school. That ninety-minute discussion only scratched the surface of the history between Israel and Palestine. Clearly, to understand such a complex topic, teachers need to devote more class time to these discussions.

“It’s rather hypocritical of teachers to say you’re supposed to become global citizens,” Mayer said. “Give [us] a space to discuss what’s happening in the world.”

Schools like Walls are capable of addressing conflicts around the world without taking a stance. The reality is that Walls is failing its students with its hesitancy.

“Israel and Palestine affected a lot of people in the school, and a lot of people were really emotionally torn-up about that,” said Mayer. “The school did nothing to support any of them.”

This failure of Walls to truly educate students on current events is destructive, particularly when considering students’ use of social media as a news source. Social media is peppered with misinformation, but even when the information students encounter is true, it often presents only one side of an issue. The effect is that students who do not seek out current events education, do not receive such an education in school, and see false or incomplete information online can easily fall prey to these echo chambers.

“Social media can portray an issue in a very biased or specific way,” Hugo Rosen (‘24) said.

Earlier this year, one of my classmates said, during a discussion of the October 7th attack, something to the effect of, “boo hoo, some people died.” I heard a similar sentiment expressed by a Walls sophomore in the commons who shouted, “f***k Israel. F***k Netanyahu. F***k Israel.” I’ve overheard conversations between students with flagrantly antisemitic messaging. While I haven’t heard rhetoric justifying the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, I would be far

from shocked to learn of it.

But even when students have access to all the right information, it’s ultimately school that teaches us how to consider that information, and that’s where we consider the second component of this argument that, in teaching students about current events, teachers can help students build their critical thinking capabilities.

“What people post, I think a lot of it has to do with polarization and thinking how controversial and nuanced issues are black and white,” Mayer explained. “I wish that we had a forum to discuss those [opinions] and actually understand what we are discussing, because I think a lot can get lost in translation, which creates emotional upset that doesn’t necessarily have to be there.”

One of the skillsets students build in high school and apply—constantly—to life post-graduation is critical thinking, a cornerstone of the Walls ethos.

This skill allows us to holistically evaluate current events to form thoughtful opinions or conclusions. Walls fails, in insulating students from broader conflicts, to help us build these skills. Despite maintaining critical thinking as a tenet of our curriculum, Walls shies away from discussions on current events. While we can develop this capacity for critical thinking elsewhere, students may not necessarily do so in the context of global conflicts.

Mayer told me about an effort that she and O’Donovan made to start this discourse at Walls, in the form of a global discussions club at lunch. “And it went well, in the beginning until it became incredibly emotionally-charged,” Mayer said. “It’s fantastic for students to speak up. But I think that students often fend for themselves when it comes to making the world a better place and making our community a better place. I think that if teachers were more or more open to providing a forum for that, it would be a lot easier.”

O’Donovan confirmed this sentiment. “We are not, you know, equipped to handle those discussions,” they said. “And so I think the teachers and staff just need to do a better job of giving us that space and leading discussions for us.”

Certainly, it’s an opportunity to teach us these skills sooner rather than later, which Walls feels hesitant to take. And it’s understandable why. When looking at the controversy between Israel and Palestine alone, it’s true that a debate on the topic could go awry. But without debating these conflicts, schools are still able to teach students about what is happening. Students, in

turn, can maintain open mindsets, can check ourselves and our peers for bias in what we are saying, and create an environment which fosters collaborative learning and critical thinking.

“Do I think it should be discussed, yes if for any reason but for students to learn how to handle conversations and discussion with people who may have differing opinions than yours,” confirmed Ms. Z.

“I like getting to hear others’ opinions and learning a bit more,” Rosen said. “Discussion is important in an academic setting.”

“The purpose of school is to prepare us for life and to educate us,” he explained, “and we can’t be educated and prepared for life if we don’t know what’s happening in the world.”

“Israel” and “Palestine” should not be words that send schools running. Nor should they be words that, in an academic setting, incite hostility. The insulation in schools from current events is destructive, precisely because it relies on the assumption that students are getting this information elsewhere and that they are always going to consider issues in a well-rounded way. When we don’t, it isn’t a fault of our own, but a fault of the information we are exposed to and a fault of an education which does not teach us to second guess what we see.

So what does it look like? On a class-by-class basis, incorporating current events into the curriculum could mean setting aside class periods to unpack what is unfolding in Gaza, or it could mean saving just a few minutes for brief discussion. “Mr. Jones starts every class with, ‘tell me what’s going on in the world,’” said Mayer. “Even though that only takes five or ten minutes at the beginning of class, it opens up these conversations that we wouldn’t have otherwise.”

Beyond that, the Walls administration must take steps to assuage teachers’ concern that facilitating discussions could lead to professional repercussions. In their caution, Walls teachers and administration successfully avoided creating space for vitriol, but what we see instead is hardly less catastrophic. The precedent at Walls can no longer be avoidance, which only serves as a breeding ground for ignorance and pent-up hostility.

“In addition to book smarts and street smarts,” said Rosen, “I think there are world smarts—knowing what’s happening in the world.”

“But we aren’t having the space to process what [the Israel-Hamas war] means for us and for our community,” said Mayer. The administration has an incredible opportunity to change that sentiment and make student voices heard. I urge teachers and administration alike to take that step. ●

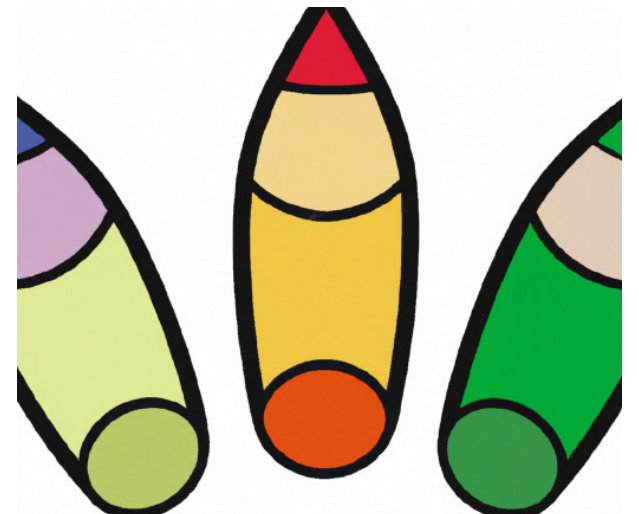
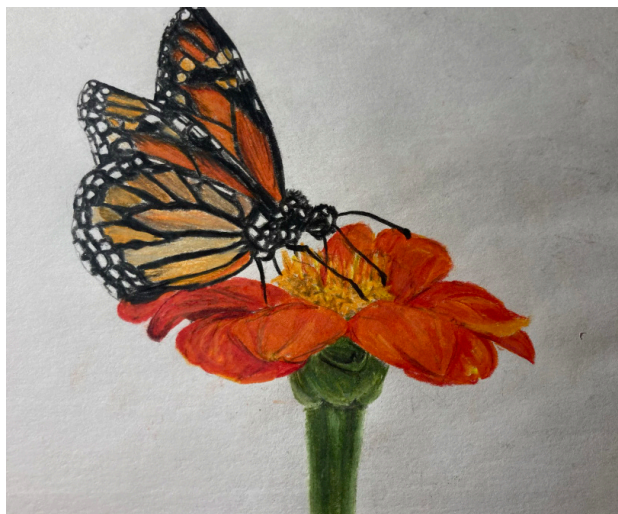
Art Produced by AI is “Pretty Mediocre Stuff,” Says AP Art Teacher

AI Art continued from page 10

He further hypothesized that “AI generated art is one of the subjects that may be taught. For example, you could have a class dedicated to the creation of AI algorithms that would generate art or a class focused on how best to use and manipulate those AI-generating art algorithms.” However, he does acknowledge that controversy could arise from this use.

Webb explained that “we throw the term ‘artificial intelligence’ around loosely but we have not actually created intelligence. AI cannot think for itself, nor can it comprehend or understand, and therefore it can’t actually create something.” He says that “instead, it takes from the internet and steals copyrighted work to use as material for its own art. This leads to the protests and anger of the people who had their arts stolen, so I imagine that many would be against the integration of AI art into our school curriculums when it’s already viewed negatively as a thief.”

Despite this, he still ultimately believes that “while AI art has a negative reputation, it is



The artwork on the left was created by an artist, while the artwork on the right was created by DALL-E. Both respond to the prompt “color.” / Credits: Rose Appenzeller and DALL-E

ultimately a tool and the morality of a tool lies within the wielder ... It entirely depends on the person using the AI.”

“When you get past that knee jerk reaction of believing that all art is going to become AI art, you start to realize that AI art can be

used for both good and bad and it’s not right to judge it based on the sliver of information that you have at the time ... I believe that once we’ve hammered out the negative aspects of AI generated art (the plagiarism and copyright) it will serve to have a positive impact on our society

Orchestra Performs “Rhapsody in Blue” For 100th Anniversary Special

By Mitchell Kasdan ('27)
Staff Writer

“Rhapsody in Blue,” an avant-garde mix of popular and classical music composed by George Gershwin, premiered for the first time 100 years ago. For its anniversary this year, the Library of Congress filmed a visual and audio collage of ensembles from across the country performing the piece. This collage included the School Without Walls symphonic orchestra.

Christopher Alberts, conductor of the SWW orchestra, attested to the effort that the orchestra put into their recording, saying “our students poured their passion into this performance.” He added that it was “an honor to contribute to a celebration of a piece that has resonated so profoundly with audiences over the past century.”

Mr. Alberts described “Rhapsody in Blue” as “a quintessential piece of American music,” and explained that the “Library of Congress often engages in commemorations of significant cultural and historical milestones. They serve as stewards of our nation’s artistic heritage and frequently collaborate with artists and organizations to celebrate noteworthy anniversaries.”

“Rhapsody in Blue” is so important to American music history and culture, “due to its innovative fusion of classical and jazz elements,” explained Mr. Alberts, the composition “marked a departure from traditional musical boundaries, capturing the energy and vibrancy of the Roaring Twenties.”

The premier demonstrated that the new music of the time, jazz, should be respected as a legitimate art form, since many didn’t like it due to its humble origins. Despite the thundering applause it received from the audience, reviews from critics were initially mixed at this new style of music. Many classical composers scoffed at Gershwin and didn’t recognize “Rhapsody in Blue” as serious music.

Avril Graffe ('27), a cello player in the SWW orchestra, said, “My favorite element of ‘Rhapsody in Blue’ has to be the jazzy rhythms and vibrant melodies. Playing those syncopated rhythms on the cello is so much fun, like I’m right in the middle of a bustling jazz club.” For Graffe, “Rhapsody” was a nice change of pace in terms of style, since most of the music



Members of the orchestra perform in a concert last year / Via Penguin Nation

for cello is classical. It brought a new energy to performing and the piece.

Chaeli Cantwell, a multimedia producer for the Library of Congress, said that the Library of Congress chose School Without Walls to participate because they “wanted to also include younger generations who are in pursuit of learning music, and the School Without Walls embodies musical education.”

Cantwell added that they “We also wanted to demonstrate how this classic piece can be incorporated in the role of musical education and the exploration of learning and mastering music. School Without Walls’s orchestra’s talent and dedication to learning this classical piece showcases how music can influence creative processes.”

“Performing for the video was an amazing experience,” Gaffe said. She and other members of the orchestra were excited about the lasting impact their performance will have. “This will be kept in the library forever. One day it will be as old as some of the books there and people will be able to see me when they show what orchestras were like in 2024,” Gaffe explained. “I felt honored to share my music in such a meaningful way”

Cantwell said that they chose “Rhapsody” for this representation because firstly, they house the “George and Ira Gershwin Collection, including George’s piano and a leath-

er-bound copy of his original manuscript of ‘Rhapsody.’” Like Mr. Alberts said, the Library of Congress records and preserves the history of the nation with things like the collection and this commemorative video. Cantwell said that with the video, they really wanted to showcase “the far reaching influence of the song and how it has taken different styles and forms.”

One hundred years ago, many composers complained that “Rhapsody” wasn’t a true song because it lacked coherency. Leonard Bernstein wrote that it was “a string of separate paragraphs stuck together — with a thin paste of flour and water.” This string of phrases, however, makes the song very adaptable and it can sound different based on the arrangement and performance with certain parts removed or located in different places. For example, the Library of Congress video features a memorable melodic phrase that Baltimore Ravens kicker Justin Tucker hummed that is not even included in the arrangement that the SWW orchestra performed. As well in the same video, the iconic opening scale for clarinet actually performed by a banjo, demonstrating the extreme adaptability of the piece. The ingenious composing, filling the song with so many interesting musical phrases, is what makes it so memorable and a bona fide American classic. ●

The Rookery’s Ins and Outs, Spring 2024 Edition

By Josie McCartney ('24) Managing Editor and Tillie Freed ('24) Senior Editor

In: Instagram reels
Out: TikTok

In: Sitting outside for lunch
Out: Sitting in Marvin or Western

In: Not committing crimes
Out: Shoplifting from CVS

In: Big 10
Out: Ivy League

In: Advisory bonding
Out: Advisory teams meetings

In: Walls school spirit
Out: Wearing college merch

In: Citing AI sources
Out: Using ChatGPT to write your essays

In: Mock AP testing
Out: SAT testing

In: Consistent sleep schedule
Out: Panera charged lemonade

In: Andy’s Pizza
Out: Roaming Rooster

In: Committed relationships
Out: Situationships

In: Getting to school at 8:50
Out: Sitting in the Commons for an hour in the mornings

In: Pretending you go to GW to get free stuff
Out: Bothering actual GW students

Walls Basketball Season in Review: One Step Closer This Year

By Eve Rebora ('25)
Staff Writer

The basketball season has recently come to an end, and players are now reflecting on a series of ups and downs.

For both boys' and girls' teams, access to sports facilities continued to be a problem. Van Harlee ('24) shared that the boys' team struggled with "not having practice time in any gym throughout the city." The team eventually was able to go back and forth between practicing at Hardy Middle School and the old Banneker recreation center, but sometimes had to resort to "practice in the auditorium" of Banneker.

The girls' team experienced similar setbacks. Nonetheless, both the boys and girls team achieved some big wins this season.

Early in the winter, the boys team pulled out a tight win in a scrimmage against sports powerhouse Georgetown Day School finishing the game 56-54, an impressive result giving them confidence and momentum leading into DCIAA games. In another nail-biter, the team took home a win against Eastern, with a final score of 62-59. Their record was enough to qualify them for DCSAA states for the first time.

Behind these successes was a team that only grew closer throughout the season. Harlee said his favorite part of the season was "the laughs in the locker room," as



The boys basketball team huddles during the halftime of their game vs. Anacostia / Credits: Nadia Lytle

Chidire Nwokwu ('25) "always has everyone laughing." The Varsity team has become quite tight-knit, despite having an even mix of players from all 4 grade levels. Harlee said that they've "grown from a group of individual players into a team" and that's what allowed for their success this season.

Despite some major successes, the boys' team did come up short in several games. Harlee said, "we lost a couple of close games and let a couple of games get out of hand that we shouldn't have." Howe-

Basketball continued on page 15

Walls Ultimate Exceeds Expectations at YULA Invite

By David Sipos ('24)
Editor-in-Chief

Facing elite teams from up and down the east coast, in March, around 20 boys on the Flightless Bird Squad, Walls ultimate frisbee team, competed in an invitational tournament hosted by the Youth Ultimate League of Arlington (YULA).

Out of 24 teams, the Flightless Bird Squad placed 11th, winning three of their six games. The two-day tournament began Saturday, Mar. 17, with a 12-8 win against Science Leadership Academy (SLA) from Philadelphia. Walls recovered from initially trailing 4-6.

Entering the tournament, Walls was seeded 19th. Though some believed Walls was seeded too low, beating SLA, the 12th seed, meant that the team had performed better than predicted for the tournament. "Beating the expectations [is] really hard to do in early season tournaments. We're happy with that," said coach Gabriel Webster. In fact, the 11th place finish was better than Walls' 13th place performance at YULA in 2023, despite last year's team generally being stronger than this year's.

Following the win against SLA, Walls faced Jordan High School from North Carolina, the fourth seed in the tournament and the top-ranked team in North Carolina. Coming into the tournament, Jordan was ranked fifth in the country, and had placed fourth at YULA 2023. A hard-fought game saw Walls come up short, losing 7-13. Jordan went on to win the tournament outright.

Despite the loss, the Flightless Bird Squad was satisfied with their play against a very strong team. "I was really happy with how we played against Jordan. They're an exceptional team... and to put up one of the best



Co-captain Malachi Merriam handles in a game against H-B Woodlawn / Credits: David Sipos

scores against them in the tournament was really cool. We were not intimidated and actually at times we looked unstoppable. So it's fun to have the confidence to play our game against even some really good teams," Mr. Webster said. Team co-captain Travis Tiller ('24) added, "I think we played fantastically... I would probably say that was my favorite of the games we played, because they ended up winning the final 13-9 and we played them 13-7. I think we had a very well-rounded game."

The Flightless Bird Squad advanced to the main bracket, where they lost in the first round to Jackson-Reed, 4-13. Though Jackson-Reed placed second in the tournament, this loss was much tougher for Walls. The team did not manage to score a single point in

the first half. Most players felt demoralized, with one bleakly commenting that they were "just warming up for [Bethesda Chevy-Chase High School]," the team Walls would face next.

"It's more of a mental thing," Tiller said.

Though Walls has beaten Jackson-Reed before, losing the skill of last year's seniors led players to "go into it thinking that it's a done deal, which is an unfortunate reality and is something we're hoping to change throughout this season."

After the loss to Jackson-Reed, the team moved to the bracket competing for ninth

Frisbee continued on page 15

Flightless Penguins Take on YULA

Frisbeeel continued from page 14

place, starting with a 13-9 win against BCC. Sunday morning, Walls faced H-B Woodlawn, from Arlington. The team trailed early, often unable to defend against deep throws from Woodlawn. Though they tied it up with ten minutes remaining, the game ended in a 7-9 point. “We played like a winning team,” but Walls was simply “unlucky,” August Rundlet (‘24) said. “Sometimes our opponents are a little bit better... we couldn’t always get the best of them,” Mason Streisand (‘27) said, “but I think we always gave it our best and we always tried our hardest.”

Finally, Walls faced Westfield High School, another Virginia team. The two traded points for the entire game, arriving tied 9-9 with minutes to spare. The game entered “universe point,” ultimate Frisbee’s version of sudden death. With a score by Van Harlee (‘24), Walls secured a 10-9 victory and an 11th place finish.

The two-day tournament marked a relatively successful outing for a team that has yet to return to its strength of the 2022-23 season. “A lot of people were saying that since we lost so many seniors, we would be much worse this year than last year. But we’re already proving that we can hang with our position last year,” Tiller said.

One of Walls’ priorities at YULA was to have sophomore and freshman newer



Co-captain Kailas Campen successfully defends a throw against Jackson-Reed / Credits: David Sipos

players “[get] used to playing against really high-quality competition players,” according to coach Lisi Lohre.

“On the YULA team you’re being, I guess the word is trained, for next year,” said Streisand, a freshman. “I’m there for more experience,” he said. “We had a few freshmen on the squad that had obviously not played Frisbee much before last season, so it was nice to see them thrive in a competitive environment that they had not been able to play in before,” Tiller said.

The developing skills of younger players and their enthusiasm for the sport means that the future of the Flightless Bird Squad appears bright. “In terms of just people who generally love playing Frisbee... every time we go out to lunch at Western Market or whatever, there’s always like a whole crew of people out there like playing Frisbee at lunch. So that’s really awesome to see,” Lohre said.

“I’m very excited for the future of the team. And I think once I graduate, it will be in very good hands,” Tiller said. ●

Season Recap

Basketball continued from page 14

ver, the boys still managed to qualify for DCSAA quarter-finals, a huge improvement upon earlier seasons. Unfortunately, up against Ballou High School, the SWW boys fell short with a season-ending score of 56-48. Despite not achieving the result they wanted, they are proud of their progress this year and look to advance even farther in states next year.

The girls similarly fought hard throughout their season, coming up short to qualify for states but putting up some impressive

numbers. They showed off their potential with a few big wins against Bard, Bell, Ballou and more, all of which they won by over 10 points. Team captain Daria Flabbi-Fruttero (‘25) credits these victories to the team spirit. Hours spent practicing together brought the group together and the team culture became “really supportive and fun,” though the team still knew when to “get serious.” Regardless of the season’s outcomes, the team is certain they want to keep this same team culture going into next year.

A few narrow losses throughout the season led to players being dissatisfied with the team’s results. Flabbi-Fruttero explained, “we struggled to create our own energy during games. We had some really close winnable

games but unfortunately we accepted defeat too early sometimes,” leading the team to fail to qualify for states. The team works to overcome challenges, including having a team full of varying skill levels and experience. Some team members have played for years, and others, including Flabbi-Fruttero, just joined the game in highschool. Regardless, their motivation remains high.

Flabbi-Fruttero shared “with the exception of our sole senior... we will all be hopefully returning” with the same goals in mind.

Every year both the boys and girls teams bring a little bit more of a competitive edge to the league, coming one step closer to dominating. Will next year finally be their year? ●

CONNECTIONS WITHOUT WALLS

Expanded Edition Special
By Max Goldberg (‘24)
Puzzle Editor

Find nine groups of four SWW-related items that share something in common. While some words may fit into multiple categories, there is only one solution for the entire puzzle.

Category Examples:

Trig Functions: Sine, Cosine, Tangent, Secant

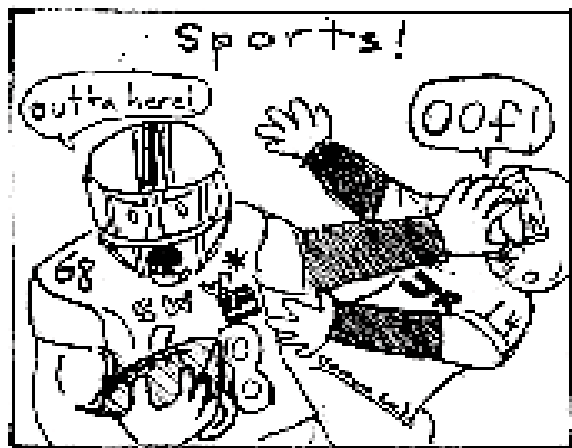
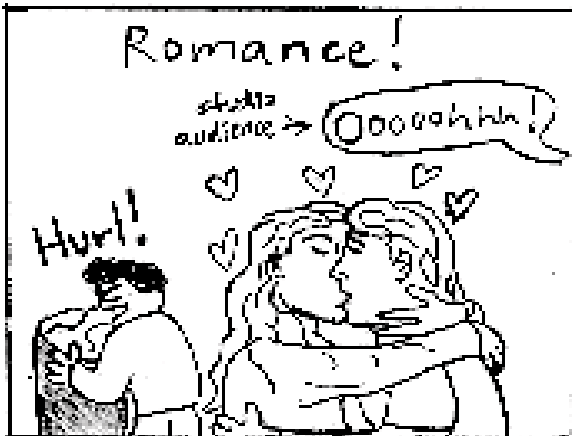
Standardized Tests: PARCC, SAT, NMSQT, Anet

SONG	ASPEN	BREAKFAST	330	PACE	STAT
DELI	SGA	PSYCH	GREEN	KEY	FRENCH
LIBRARY	GRANT	TURNITIN	LIT	DRAMA	PINK
LSAT	FALAFEL	BLUE	PANERA	12	THRIFT
CANVAS	GSA	BLESSING	HSA	CHINESE	COMMONS
PURPLE	LATIN	SPANISH	ROOSTER	WORLD	CLEVER

COMICS

“Almost Spring”

By Derek Emons ('24)
Resident Artist



I know we don't have a team... A man can dream!



“Almost Spring”
By Derek, Mar. 2024



TT3

CROSSWORD

A Blessing in Disguise

By Max Goldberg ('24)
Puzzle Editor

ACROSS

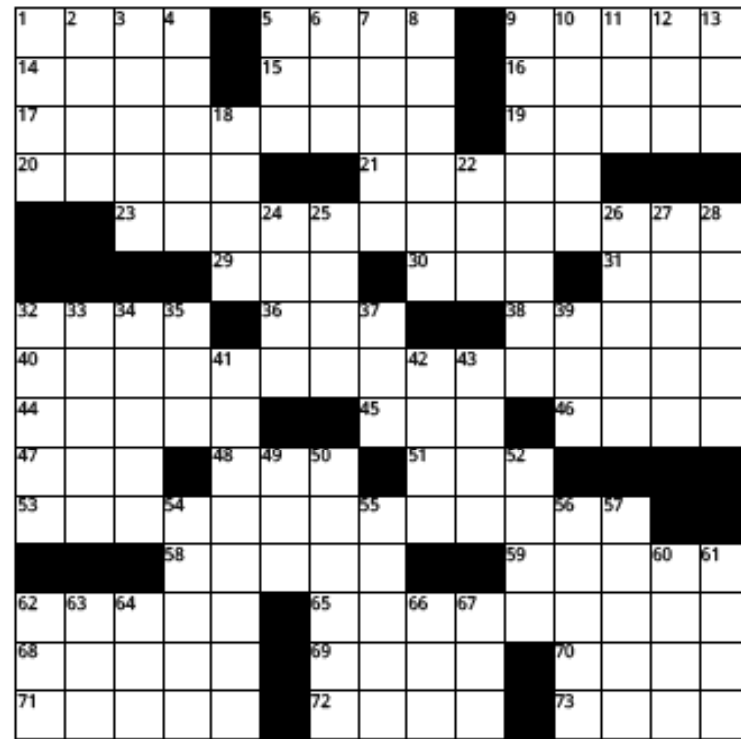
- 1 Room 230 club
- 5 Nibble away
- 9 Seine city
- 14 Singer Celine
- 15 Fit
- 16 Video game pioneer
- 17 Ready for trouble*
- 19 “Copy that”
- 20 Calamar!
- 21 Continental divide?
- 23 Tell a secret*
- 29 ___ Chi
- 30 Road warning
- 31 Mr. Ghazi's AP, Informally
- 32 Middle school for many Walls students
- 36 Pig pen
- 38 Oversight
- 40 Feeling ill*
- 44 V-formation birds
- 45 Section on the AP World exam
- 46 Common street name
- 47 Cult ending?
- 48 Genetic letters
- 51 Fanatic
- 53 What the starred clues, and the title of this puzzle, all are
- 58 Saturn's largest moon
- 59 Knock off
- 62 Bit of parsley
- 65 “Good luck!”*
- 68 Kangaroo carrier

69 It's just not right

- 70 Taboo
- 71 49D's turn up
- 72 Upper hand
- 73 Some explosives

DOWN

- 1 Kerfuffles
- 2 Five, in 9A
- 3 Pond flower
- 4 Behind the times
- 5 Chitchat
- 6 Wizards' org.
- 7 Divide out
- 8 Big name in fruit snacks
- 9 Algebra II graph shape
- 10 Make up
- 11 Sleazy tabloid
- 12 Furious feeling
- 13 Respectful address
- 18 Modify
- 22 Slippery fish
- 24 Stand the test of time
- 25 Pol. neighbor
- 26 Top dog
- 27 Japanese-American
- 28 Bow's opposite
- 32 Unearthed
- 33 January in Juarez
- 34 Take ___ breath
- 35 “___ Mlz”
- 37 Thumbs up
- 39 Dollar dispenser
- 41 You don't want to run it
- 42 Magician's accessory



- 43 Prefix with lateral
- 49 D.C. baseballer
- 50 Fit for farming
- 52 Clock noise
- 54 New York city?
- 55 How Santa dresses
- 56 Intended
- 57 Beauty parlor
- 60 On its way
- 61 Big heads
- 62 “Me day” destination
- 63 Poker prize
- 64 Barbecue seasoning
- 66 CD followers?
- 67 Did it with style

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Find us on Mondays at 8:30 a.m. in room 127 to contribute to the paper!